

Empire Building
430 Sixteenth Street
South Corner of Sixteenth
Street and Glenarm Place
City of Denver
Denver County
Colorado

HABS No. CO-87

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
EMPIRE BUILDING

Location: The Empire Building is located at 430 Sixteenth Street, Denver, Colorado. The building is on the south corner of Sixteenth Street and Glenarm Place, Lots 1 through 4, Block 196, East Denver.

Quad: Englewood, 1980

Date of Construction: 1906-07

Present Owner: BCE Development Properties Inc.
370 Seventeenth Street
Suite 3800
Denver, Colorado 80202

Present Use: Commercial retail and office building (partially vacated)

Significance: Designed by Frank E. Edbrooke, the Empire Building is a significant example of the later works of one of Denver's most prominent architects, and represents early low-rise commercial construction in the downtown area. The original owners of the Empire Building--Horace Bennett, Julius Myers, and Jerome Riche--were Colorado pioneers and influential real estate developers in Denver.

Historians: R. Laurie Simmons and Christine Whitacre; Front Range Research Associates, Inc.; Denver, Colorado; May 1989

Were Mr. Edbrooke's buildings to be taken out of Denver it would indeed leave a small village behind, as he has designed nearly all the large offices and public buildings in the city, and the most beautiful and prominent Denver churches, residences, theaters and hotels are standing monuments to commemorate his genius for generations to come.¹

Located at 430 Sixteenth Street in downtown Denver, the Empire Building was constructed in 1906-07 by real estate developers Julius Myers, Horace Bennett, and Jerome Riche. The building was designed by Frank E. Edbrooke, one of Denver's most prominent and prolific architects, whose works include the city's Brown Palace Hotel, Masonic Temple, and Denver Dry Goods Store. In his 1973 book, Historic Denver 1858-1893, architectural historian Richard Brettell wrote that Edbrooke "was almost singlehandedly responsible for the architectural maturity of Denver's downtown in the late 1880s and 1890s."² The Empire Building, a six-story, brick, steel frame, commercial building with Neo-classical ornament, is representative of the mature designs of the later portion of the architect's career. The building also represents the low-rise office and retail buildings which characterized downtown Denver in the early part of the twentieth century.

Construction on the Empire Building began in 1906, at a time when Denver's economy was enjoying an economic upswing. During the depression of the 1890s, Colorado had experienced widespread business failures, unemployment, labor unrest, and agricultural distress. In 1906, however, seven million dollars were spent on new construction in Denver, and confidence in the city's growth was mirrored in the construction of the city's \$250,000 Carnegie Library, YMCA Building, El Jebel Temple, and City Auditorium, which was aimed at attracting new business to Denver.³

¹James I. Day, Our Architecture and Scenes of Denver (Denver: James I. Day, 1906).

²Richard R. Brettell, Historic Denver 1858-1893 (Denver: Historic Denver, Inc., 1973), 33.

³Denver Republican, 1 January 1907, 5.

Real estate developers Julius Myers and Horace Bennett reflected the city's optimistic mood when they financed the construction of two new office buildings in downtown Denver. The Commonwealth Building, a six-story edifice on Fifteenth Street, was begun in 1905 and completed the following year. In 1906, Myers and Bennett, together with Jerome Riche, built the six-story Empire Building on the corner of Sixteenth Street and Glenarm Place (previously Glenarm Street), replacing a low block of small stores.

The Empire Building's facade was located on Sixteenth Street which, since its inception, has been Denver's main shopping district and the center of its public life. Like many of the historic post-1900 structures along Sixteenth Street, the Empire Building illustrates the "modernization" of the downtown business district. By 1900, the exuberant eclecticism of nineteenth century Denver had given way to a new, more sober, architectural aesthetic. With their steel frame construction, discrete ornamentation, and classical styling, Sixteenth Street's modern commercial buildings reflected the conservatively optimistic mood of Denver during the first part of twentieth century.

Original Owners of the Empire Building: Myers, Bennett, Riche

The developers and original owners of the Empire Building--Myers, Bennett, and Riche--were pioneer Colorado businessmen. Julius A. Myers was born in Summit County, Ohio, in 1846. During the Civil War, Myers served in the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry which, at war's end, was sent west to take part in military expeditions in Wyoming. By the early 1870s, Myers was employed by the Kansas Pacific Railroad in Denver. He later worked for the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad in various cities in Colorado as pay master, train master, and, eventually, superintendent. In 1880, Myers was elected an alderman of Denver; he later served as a Republican state representative. In 1885, he ran unsuccessfully for the office of mayor of Denver.⁴

In December, 1885, Myers formed a real estate partnership with businessman Horace W. Bennett. Born in Hamburg, Michigan, in 1862, Bennett had established several successful mercantile businesses in Michigan before coming to Denver in 1883. In Denver, Myers opened a real estate and loan office with J. A. Fisher. In 1885, Julius Myers replaced Fisher as Bennett's

⁴Denver Times, 15 June 1918, 2; Denver Post, 15 June 1918, 7; Frank Hall, History of the State of Colorado (Chicago: Blakely Printing Co., 1889-1895), 4:516-517.

partner, and the firm of Bennett and Myers was founded.⁵

Bennett and Myers was one of the largest and most influential real estate firms in Denver, responsible for the construction of several large business blocks in the downtown area. In 1918, the Denver Post stated that "the firm of Bennett and Myers...has been identified closely with every real estate movement of this city."⁶ In addition to the Empire Building, the company built the Commonwealth, Temple Court, Wyoming, Belvedere, Enterprise, Majestic, and Gas and Electric Buildings, the last two of which were designed by Frank Edbrooke. Bennett and Myers also purchased the Tabor Opera House, which they modernized at a cost of \$150,000 in 1908. The real estate investments of Bennett and Myers were said to comprise some of the most desirable properties in the city.⁷

Bennett and Myers were also involved in the development of the mining town of Cripple Creek. In the late 1880s, after two short-lived and largely unsuccessful mining booms, the hills around Cripple Creek were converted to grazing lands for cattle. Horace Bennett was interested in the cattle industry and, as a result, Bennett and Myers purchased much of the grazing land around the future site of Cripple Creek, including the ranch of Robert Womack. After Womack discovered gold in the area in 1890, Bennett and Myers turned their grazing lands into the townsite of Fremont, later called Cripple Creek. Town lots, which in the beginning sold for fifty dollars, soared to three thousand dollars as the mining boom flourished. By 1900, Cripple Creek was producing nearly one-fourth of the gold mined in the United States, and Bennett and Myers eventually sold more than \$500,000 of town lots. The town of Cripple Creek, of which two of the major thoroughfares are christened Bennett and Myers Avenues, provided the firm with a fortune, much of which found its way into the improvement of Denver real estate. After Myers' death in 1918, Bennett continued the firm, which was then known as H. W. Bennett and Company, until his death in 1941.⁸

⁵Hall, 4:371; Denver Post, 9 June 1941, p. 1, and 10 June 1941, p. 11.

⁶Denver Post, 15 June 1918, 7.

⁷Hall, 4:371 and 516-517; Denver Times, 15 June 1918, 2.

⁸Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith, A Colorado History (Boulder, Colo.: Pruett Publishing Co., 1976), 208-211; Denver Post, 15 June 1918, 7; Denver Times, 15 June 1918, 2; and Denver Post, 9 June 1941, 1.

The third original owner of the Empire Building, Jerome S. Riche, was Horace Bennett's father-in-law. A French immigrant, Riche was sixteen years old when he followed his sister to Denver in 1866. Riche became a business associate of his sister's husband, Frederick Charpiot, and with him opened Denver's Charpiot Hotel in 1871. Nicknamed the "Delmonico of the West," the Charpiot was famous for its excellent French cuisine and celebrity clientele. Following the success of his hotel, Riche began investing in real estate, from which he accumulated considerable profits.⁹

The Architect: Frank E. Edbrooke

The architect for the Empire Building, Frank E. Edbrooke, was approaching the end of a long and illustrious career when the Empire Building was completed in 1906-07. Born in Lake County, Illinois, in 1840, Edbrooke first studied the architectural and construction trades under his father, Robert J. Edbrooke, an English-born builder. After serving with the Twelfth Illinois Infantry during the Civil War, Edbrooke worked with his father rebuilding structures after the 1871 Chicago fire. Later, Edbrooke worked for the Union Pacific Railroad designing depots and hotels.

In 1879, Edbrooke's brother Willoughby, a prominent Chicago architect, was hired by Colorado businessman Horace Tabor to design the Tabor Block in Denver. Frank Edbrooke arrived in Colorado in that year to supervise the construction of the commercial block, also working on the Tabor Opera House. The opera house, which has been torn down, was one of Denver's most influential buildings, leaving a decisive mark on Denver's built environment of the late nineteenth century.

By the end of the 1880s, Edbrooke had become the city's most successful commercial architect. His Brown Palace Hotel (1890-1892) had an immense impact on the growth and development of downtown Denver and its architecture. Edbrooke's buildings incorporated a variety of styles and building techniques which changed the face of Denver. His company became the largest architectural firm in the state, training many of the city's finest architects.

⁹Denver Times, 11 September 1926, 1; and Thomas J. Noel, Denver's Larimer Street (Denver: Historic Denver, 1981), 110.

The Silver Panic of 1893 led to a dramatic downturn in construction in Denver. Unlike many of his colleagues, however, Edbrooke survived the crash and his firm remained the leader in Denver's architectural community. During his career, Edbrooke designed many public buildings, residences, and commercial blocks, including the Denver Chamber of Commerce Building, Navarre Hotel, Masonic Temple, Denver Dry Goods Company, Oxford Hotel, People's National Savings Bank, Central Presbyterian Church, Ernest and Cranmer Building, and Colorado State Museum. Edbrooke was also the final architect for the Colorado State Capitol. After completing thirty-six years of architectural work in Colorado, Edbrooke retired in 1915 and moved to California, where he died in 1921.¹⁰

Construction of the Empire Building

Two building permits were filed for the construction of the Empire Building. The first, permit number 87, dated 18 January 1906, was for the construction of the foundation for a six-story building measuring 126 feet, six inches, by 100 feet, nine inches. The estimated cost of construction was eleven thousand dollars.

On 6 March 1906, building permit number 364 was issued for the construction of the six-story office building, which was to measure 100 feet by 125 feet. The estimated cost of the building was \$150,000. Alex Mathers was hired to build the edifice. Other contractors who worked on the Empire Building included the Smith Brothers Plumbing Company, the Denver Electric Wiring Company, and the Denver Iron and Wire Works Company.

Compared to the Brown Palace Hotel and some of Edbrooke's other designs, the Empire Building was not a lavishly constructed building. The lobby and interior offices were small and modestly designed. Still, the building commanded an important position on Sixteenth Street and represented the revitalization of post-crash Denver. In homage to the newly-constructed Empire Building, the 1889 Kittredge Building--which was located diagonally across from the Empire Building on Sixteenth Street--was remodeled and modernized at a cost of fifty thousand dollars in 1906.¹¹

In addition to its retail storefronts, the Empire Building

¹⁰Thomas J. Noel and Barbara S. Norgren, Denver: The City Beautiful (Denver: Historic Denver, Inc., 1987), 195.

¹¹Denver Republican, 1 January 1907, 5.

was created to provide office space for small businesses. The building was designed with 145 offices, each of which had a sink, suggesting that they were primarily intended for doctors and dentists who were prominent among the early tenants of the building. Historically, this section of downtown Denver contained several such medical buildings, including the Majestic, Metropolitan, and Republic Buildings, all of which have been demolished. Like the Empire Building, the Majestic Building was built by Bennett and Myers and designed by Frank Edbrooke.

Tenants of the Empire Building

When the city directory of 1907 was published, the Empire Building was not fully occupied, having been finished in the early months of the year. Among the businesses in residence were a chiropractor, a barber, six dentists, six legal firms, and seventeen physicians. Alpha Floral, which had been renting a storefront in a nearby building, moved into the Empire Building when it was completed in 1907.

During the next two decades, the building filled with health care providers, as well as a diverse group of small businesses and professional workers. By the mid-1920s, dentists, osteopaths, physicians, and chiropractors predominated in the building. The Westminster Law School, oil companies, beauty shops, the Denver Sheltering Home for Jewish Children, insurance companies, a realtor, an architect, and the County Superintendent of Schools also maintained offices in the building during that decade. Alpha Floral, Symonds-Atkinson Optical Company, Galvin's Millinery, Rothenberg and Schloss Cigar Company, and a jeweler occupied storefronts.

By the 1930s, the demography of the Empire Building's tenants was well established. Dentists, physicians, and other medical practitioners were the primary occupants, with a wide variety of other small businesses and organizations filling the rest of the rooms. During the Depression years, these tenants included such diverse groups as beauticians, reading clubs, insurance agents, a watchmaker, and the Dacono Townsite Company. Storefront businesses included Alpha Floral, Symonds-Atkinson Optical, a milliner, a dress shop, and James Veraldi's restaurant, which occupied the corner entrance shop. In the late 1930s, Veraldi's moved out and Baur's Confectionery opened a branch store in that location.

Occupants during the next two decades continued to be diverse small businessmen, health care professionals, insurance agents, and service organizations. Included among these in the 1940s were

the Allied Jewish Council of Denver, the Westminster Law School, the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Colorado, Consolidated Coke and Coal Company, the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'Rith, and the Hotel Greeters Association. By the mid-1950s, one of the Empire Building's most long-term tenants, Alpha Floral, vacated its storefront and Universal Studios photographers moved into the former flower store site.

By the 1950s, the decentralization of the medical community had lessened the number of physicians and other health practitioners occupying offices in the Empire Building. Long-time tenants Drs. M. A. and M. B. Case remained, however, along with several others in the health field. Marion B. Case continued to practice dentistry in the building into the 1970s. During the 1960s and 1970s, occupancy rates within the Empire Building declined.¹²

Subsequent Owners of the Empire Building

In the 1920s, Horace Bennett sold the Empire Building to the Leopold H. Guldman family. Born in 1852 in Germany, Leopold Guldman came to the United States at age seventeen. In 1879, he established what later became known as the Golden Eagle Dry Goods Store at Sixteenth and Lawrence Streets. The store's motto--"Buy and Sell for Cash"--underscored Guldman's business acumen, and he invested the store's profits in Denver real estate. When he died in 1936, the Denver Post wrote that Guldman was "probably the largest single holder of real estate in Denver."¹³

Florence G. Schlesinger, who was related to the Guldman family, owned the Empire Building from 1971 until 1977. Melvin Schlesinger owned the property from 1977 until 1981. Oxford-Ansco Development Company initiated a lease with an option to purchase the building on 1 October 1981. In 1986, BCE Development Properties Inc. purchased the Empire Building from Oxford Properties, Inc., a successor to the Oxford-Ansco joint venture, as part of a multi-city purchase of Oxford's U.S. properties. The Empire Building site is now slated to be redeveloped as part of an urban renewal project. During the summer of 1986, the office tenants of the building were given eviction notices and by January, 1987, the upper floors of the Empire Building were vacated.

¹²Denver City Directories, 1907-1977.

¹³Denver Post, 3 June 1936, 1.

Architectural Design of the Empire Building

The original architectural drawings of the Empire Building are located at the Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado. Included with this HABS report are photographic copies of these drawings, which encompass all of the exterior elevations, the rooftop, and the floor plans for the basement and the second through fifth floors (HABS photo nos. CO-87-17 through CO-87-29). The architectural drawings for the first and sixth floors have not been located, although the drawings at the Colorado Historical Society include small segments of the first floor (HABS photo nos. CO-87-22 and CO-87-23).

The Empire Building is a hybrid, a twentieth century commercial building with Richardsonian massing and Neo-classical ornamentation. Like several of Edbrooke's buildings, the Empire Building is U-shaped, with a light well at the rear, which provides light and ventilation. The street elevations--Sixteenth Street and Glenarm Place--are finished in pressed white brick with limestone trim, as is the light well.¹⁴ The rear and alley elevations are covered with less expensive red brick.

Horizontally, the Empire Building is divided into three bands. The first two floors are the base of the building, "supporting" the pilastered and arcaded upper floors. At the top is the building's bracketed metal cornice.

From the third through fifth floors, the arcaded window openings feature square "Chicago-style" windows, each having a fixed center pane with operable sash windows on either side. Each window also has a transom bar. On the second floor, the windows are rectangular and wider than the windows on the floors above, as if the second story is being "flattened" by the weight of the pilasters which rest upon its cornice. The limestone trim on the second floor reinforces the sense of strength and solidity of the building's base.

The Sixteenth Street elevation has nine vertical bays; the Glenarm Place elevation has seven bays. The Sixteenth Street elevation's center bay, which contains the building's entryway, is slightly narrower than the other bays. At the top of each pilastered and arcaded bay is a sixth-floor, semi-circular arched, double-hung window with sidelights. The pilasters have unadorned capitals and limestone bases. Corbelled brick spandrels separate the floors. Corbelled brick also separates the sixth floor from

¹⁴Denver Republican, 1 January 1907, 5.

the building entablature. The building's frieze has small rectangular vents, covered with iron grillwork and framed with pressed metal trim.

The Sixteenth Street and Glenarm Place elevations have storefront entrances. Historically, the storefronts had recessed entrances flanked by large display windows, clerestories, and transoms. Like many downtown retail establishments, the Empire Building storefronts have been remodeled with new brick and tile wall cladding, new signage, and remodeled windows and doors.

The Empire Building has undergone several renovations. In 1961, the elevators were replaced; in 1963, the plumbing was upgraded; and in 1971, some of the offices were remodeled. The entrance has been remodeled at least twice, most recently in 1957, when the lobby also underwent a major renovation. The building originally had a coal-fired boiler, but at some point was converted to steam heat. Many of the offices in the Empire Building have small cast iron radiators with manual controls. Air conditioning was accomplished by individual window units which were owned and operated by the tenants.¹⁵

The Empire Building's first floor facade and first floor interior have been remodeled. The building's original entryway, which can be seen on the architectural drawings (HABS photo no. CO-87-17), had an elliptical arch of decorative pressed metal, and a metal entablature supported by metal columns. The frieze was emblazoned with the words "Empire Building." The glazed double entry doors were flanked by metal pilasters and had a single vertical panel, above which was an elliptical fanlight with tracery. Photographs indicate that by the 1940s, the entryway's historic metalwork had been altered and the fanlight covered or replaced. Many of the storefronts were also remodeled by the 1940s, including the corner storefront which was renovated with new windows and wall siding to serve as Baur's Confectionery Store. During the 1957 remodeling, the entryway was changed with the addition of polished green marble slabs on either side of the doors. Corrugated aluminum was installed above the doorway, covering the frieze and the area where the historic fanlight had been located.

The building lobby originally had plaster walls with wainscot. The floor was covered with small, glazed, hexagonal-shaped tiles. A former tenant of the building believes that the lobby floor plan has remained basically unchanged, although the

¹⁵"Empire Building" files, BCE Development Company, 370 17th Street, Denver, Colorado.

lobby originally had an interior doorway which was a second entrance to the storefront business at 432 Sixteenth Street.¹⁶

During the 1957 remodeling, the lobby was modernized with green marble wall cladding and terrazzo flooring. A lowered false ceiling, consisting of a metal frame with removable plastic grate panels, was installed. During the HABS survey, some of the ceiling grates were removed in order to photograph the original ceiling, which featured recessed panels ornamented with decorative plasterwork friezes (HABS photo no. CO-87-8). Similar plasterwork is found on the ceiling above the first floor stairwell (HABS photo no. CO-87-9). Although the Empire Building was built with a skylight between the first and second floors (HABS photo no. CO-87-24), the skylight has been covered and is no longer visible from the first floor (HABS photo no. CO-87-7).

The upper floors of the Empire Building have also undergone remodeling. Most of the ceilings have been lowered, and all the floors have been covered with non-historic floor coverings. The offices have been completely vacated since January 1987, and many of the offices have since been vandalized. Graffiti can be found in nearly every office in the building.

Historically, the second through sixth floors of the Empire Building all had the same floor plan. Each U-shaped floor contained twenty-nine offices. Nineteen offices were located on the outside of the "U," with windows on the facade and side elevations. Ten offices were on the inside of the "U," with windows facing the interior light well. Of the nineteen outside offices, nine were on the Sixteenth Street elevation, reflecting the nine front bays of the building; five were located on both the Glenarm Place and alley side elevations. The size of each outside office averaged approximately 300 square feet; most of the inside offices were 140 square feet. The outside offices on the Glenarm Place side were the largest in the building. These offices, which had reception rooms, averaged roughly 540 square feet. The offices closest to the elevator on the alley side of the building also had reception rooms. The rest of the offices consisted of one room.

Every office had a sink. The southern corner of each floor contained a lavatory and a janitor's room. Men's and women's lavatories alternated between the floors: men's on the second, women's on the third, etc.

The offices have retained most of their historic windows and

¹⁶Interview with Vern Oppenlander, Alpha Floral, 24 May 1989.

doors, all of which have plain wood trim. The doors are plate glass, with the office number painted on the glass. Above each door is a hinged transom, also of plate glass. The doors of the outside offices on the side elevations are flanked by rectangular windows; the lower lights have textured glass, the upper lights have plate glass. Of the inside offices, only the corner offices, which are closest to the elevator, have windows. The offices on the facade have square windows which appear to be historic, although they are not shown on the architectural drawings (HABS photo no. CO-87-14).

Each office was originally connected to its adjacent offices through side entrances. Over the years, however, many of the offices were enlarged by removing the side walls. Few of the original side doors, which were paneled wood, are extant.

The Empire Building has retained its historic cast iron, open well stairway, which was supplied by the Denver Iron and Wire Works Company. Two flights of closed string stairs and a landing are located between each floor. The newel posts are squared and paneled columns, crowned by large, rough-cast knobs. The risers are of paneled and raked iron. Between the first and second floors, the stairway treads and landing are marble (HABS photo. no. CO-87-10). Above the second floor, the stairway treads and landings are constructed of cast iron textured in a diamond-shaped pattern (HABS photo no. CO-87-11). The stairway walls between the first and second floor have polished marble wainscot, trimmed with pink marble. The marble wainscot does not extend above the second floor.

Also original to the Empire Building is the mail chute which runs between the first and sixth floors, and is located opposite the stairwell. The chute, which has decorative metal letter drops, was manufactured by the Cutler Manufacturing Company of Rochester, New York (HABS photo no. CO-87-13). The mail box, located in the first floor stairwell, had been removed prior to the HABS survey.

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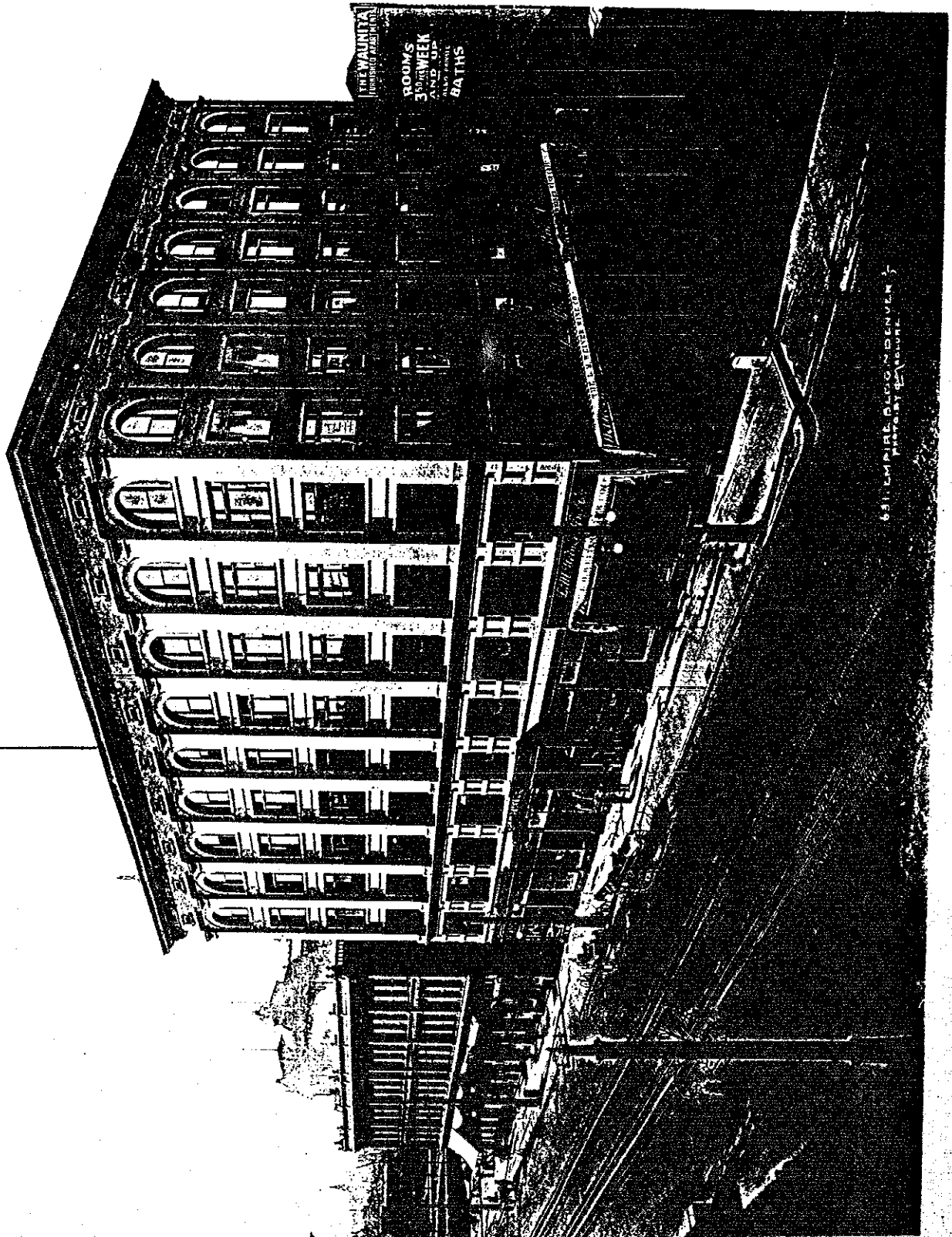
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(1906).



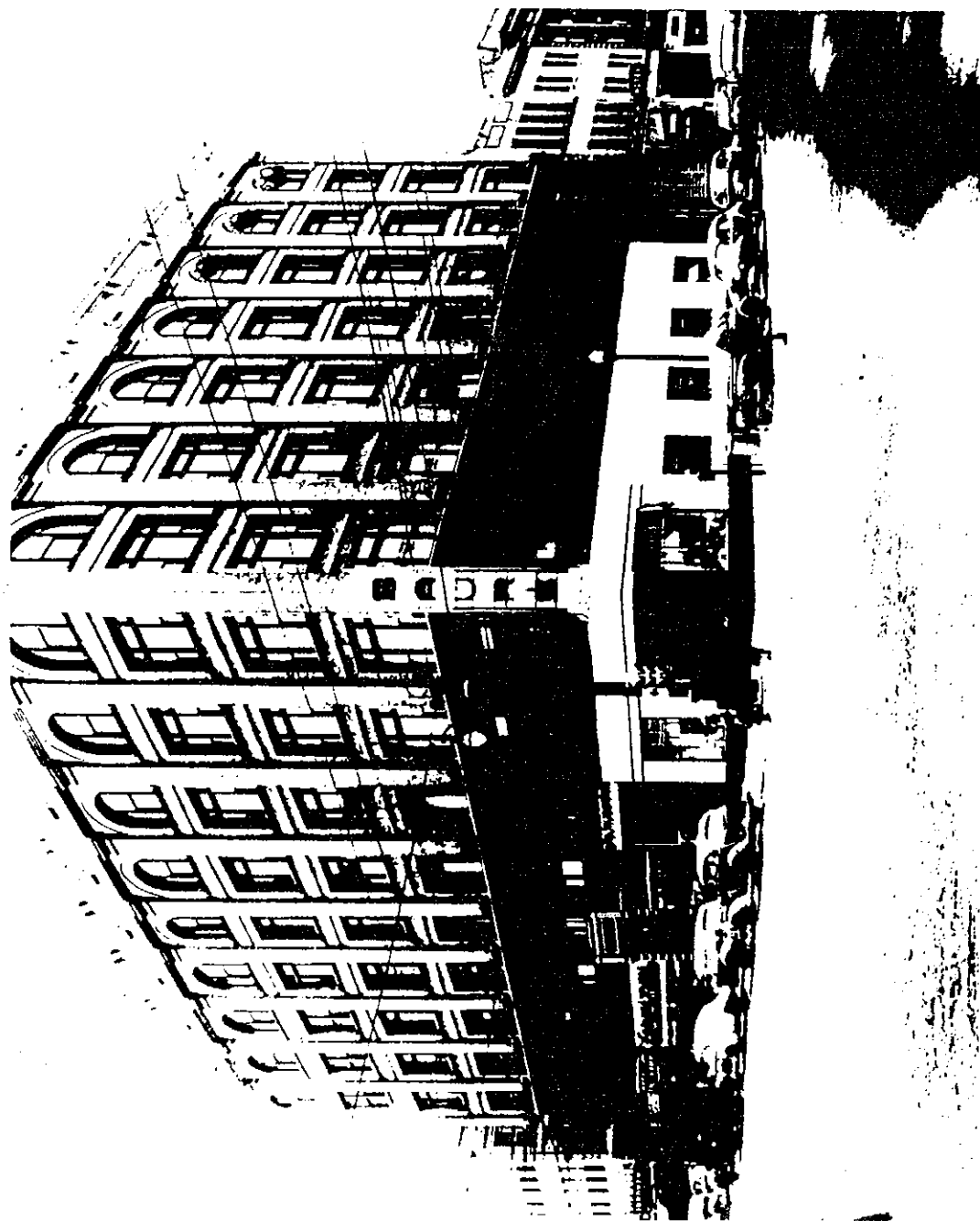
EMPIRE BUILDING, Corner 16th and Glenarm Streets.

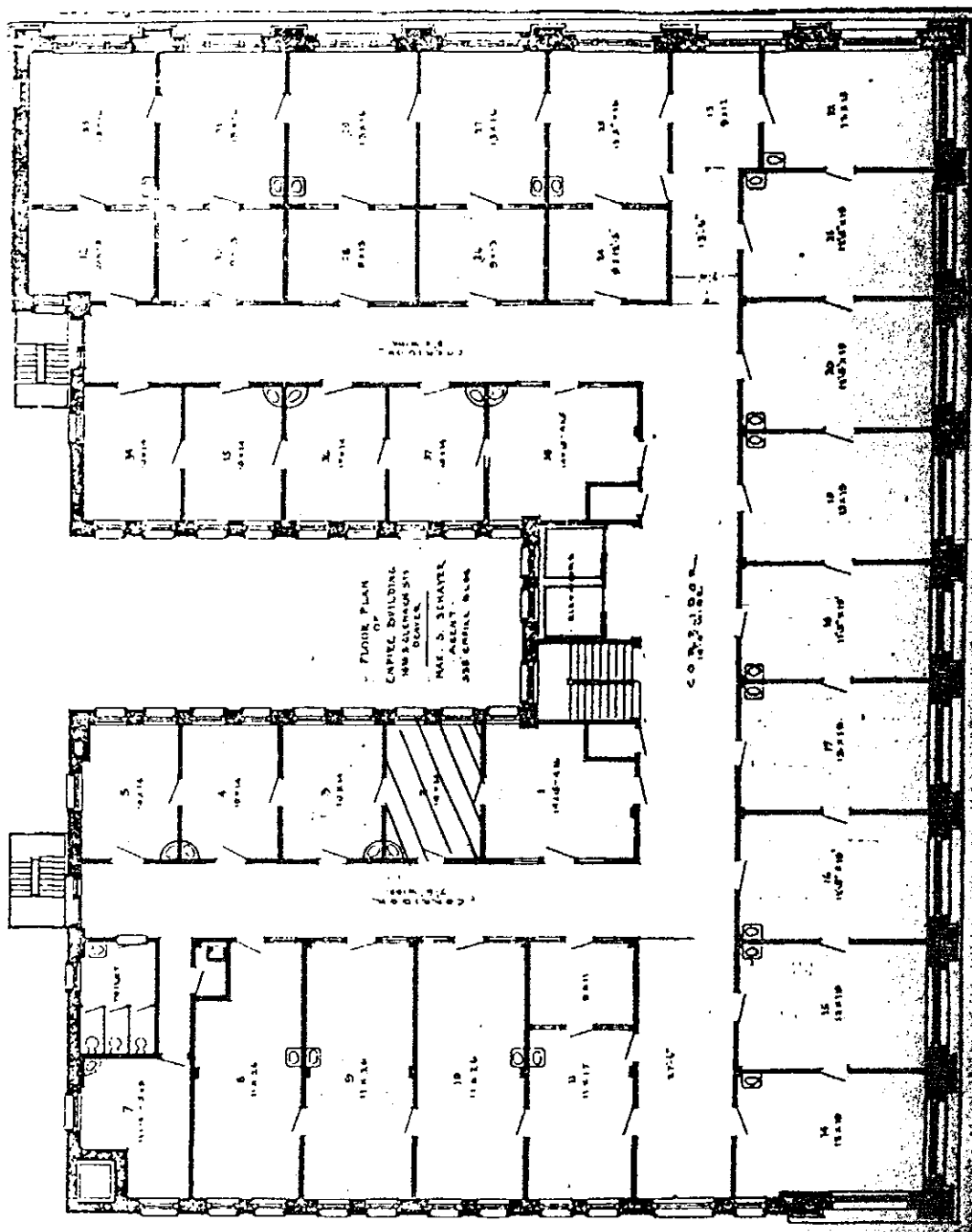
F. E. Edbrooke Architect Co.

Empire Building, shortly after its completion in 1907. From the photo collection of the Western History Department, Denver Public Library.



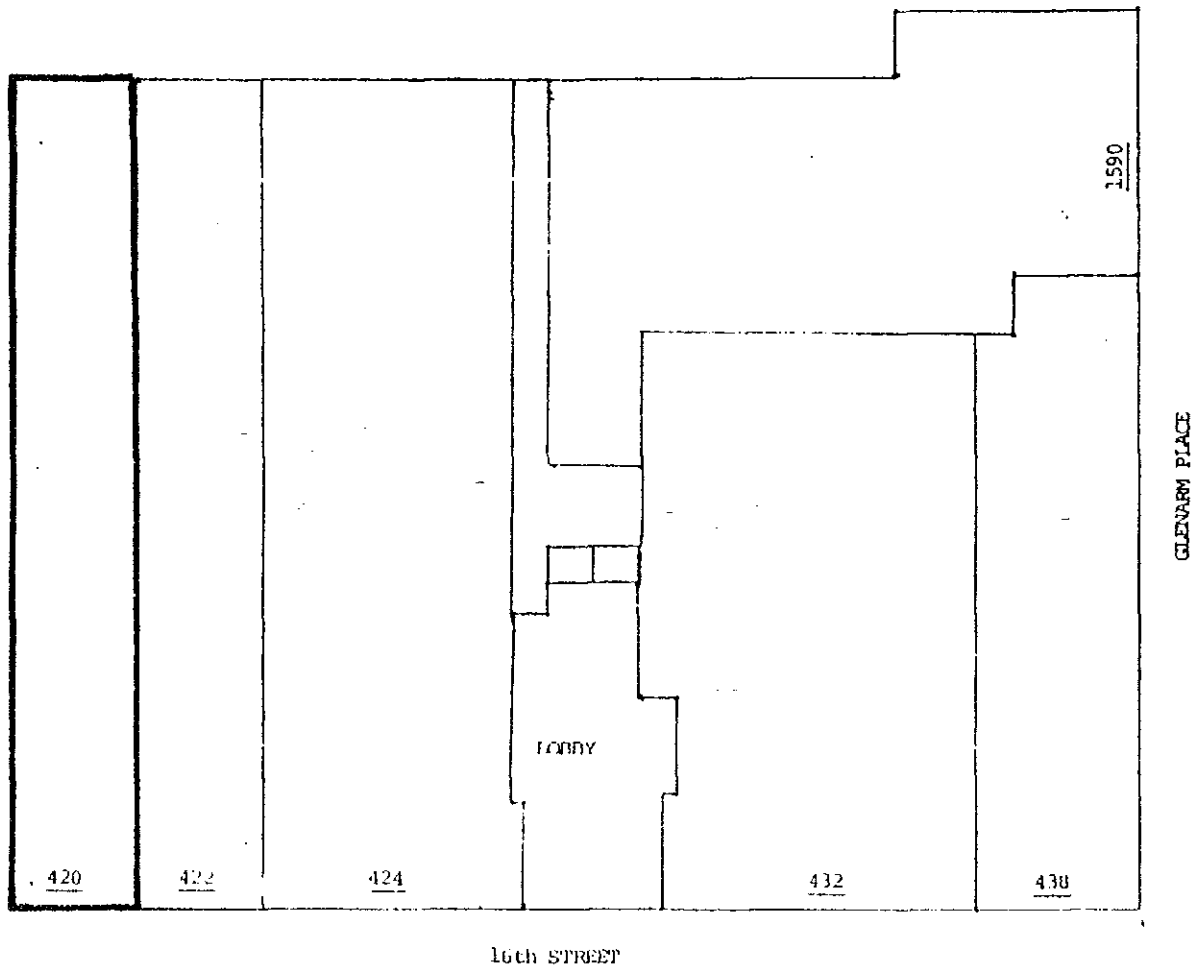
Empire Building in the 1940s. From the photo collection of the Colorado Historical Society.





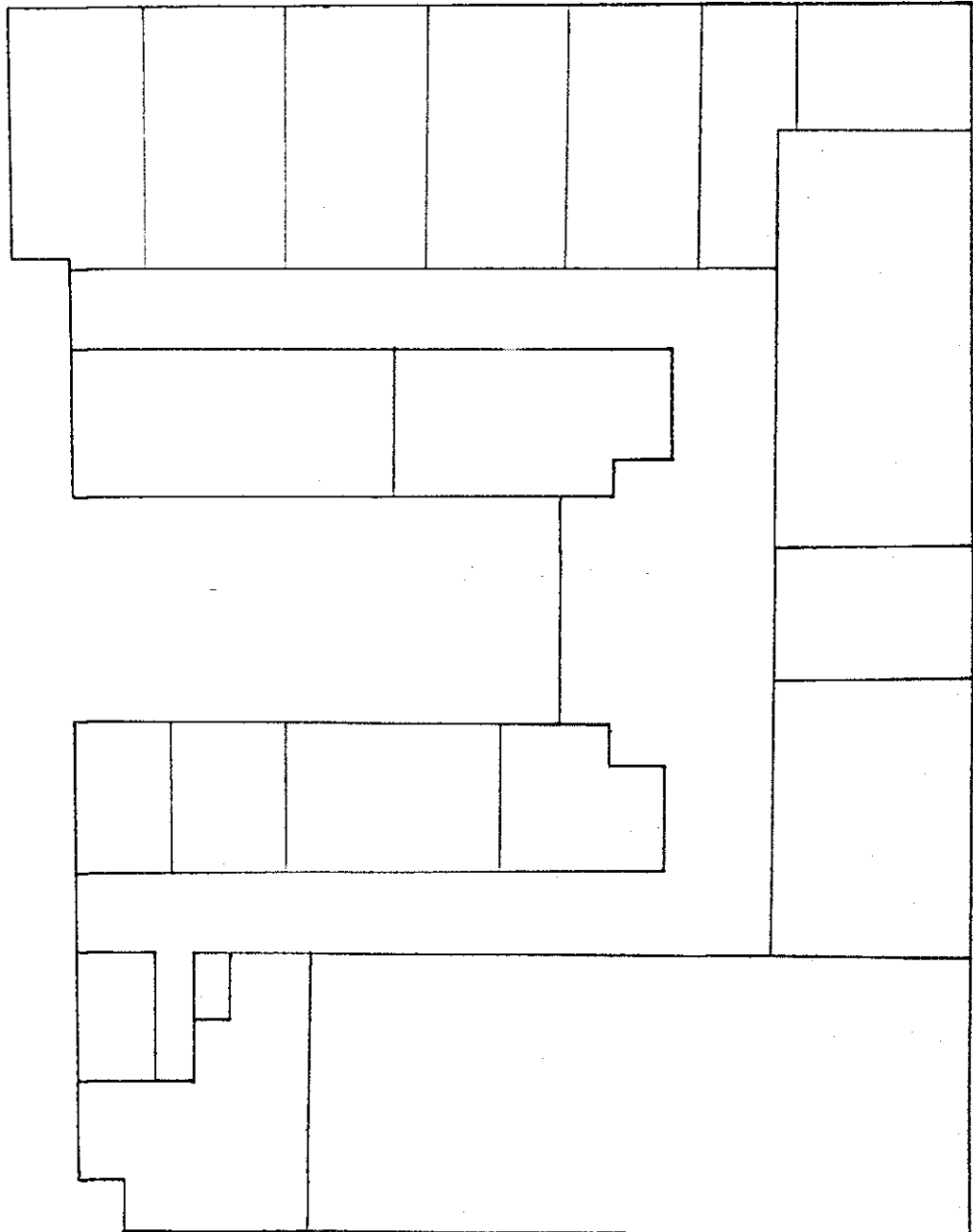
Empire Building, first floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING
Denver, Colorado



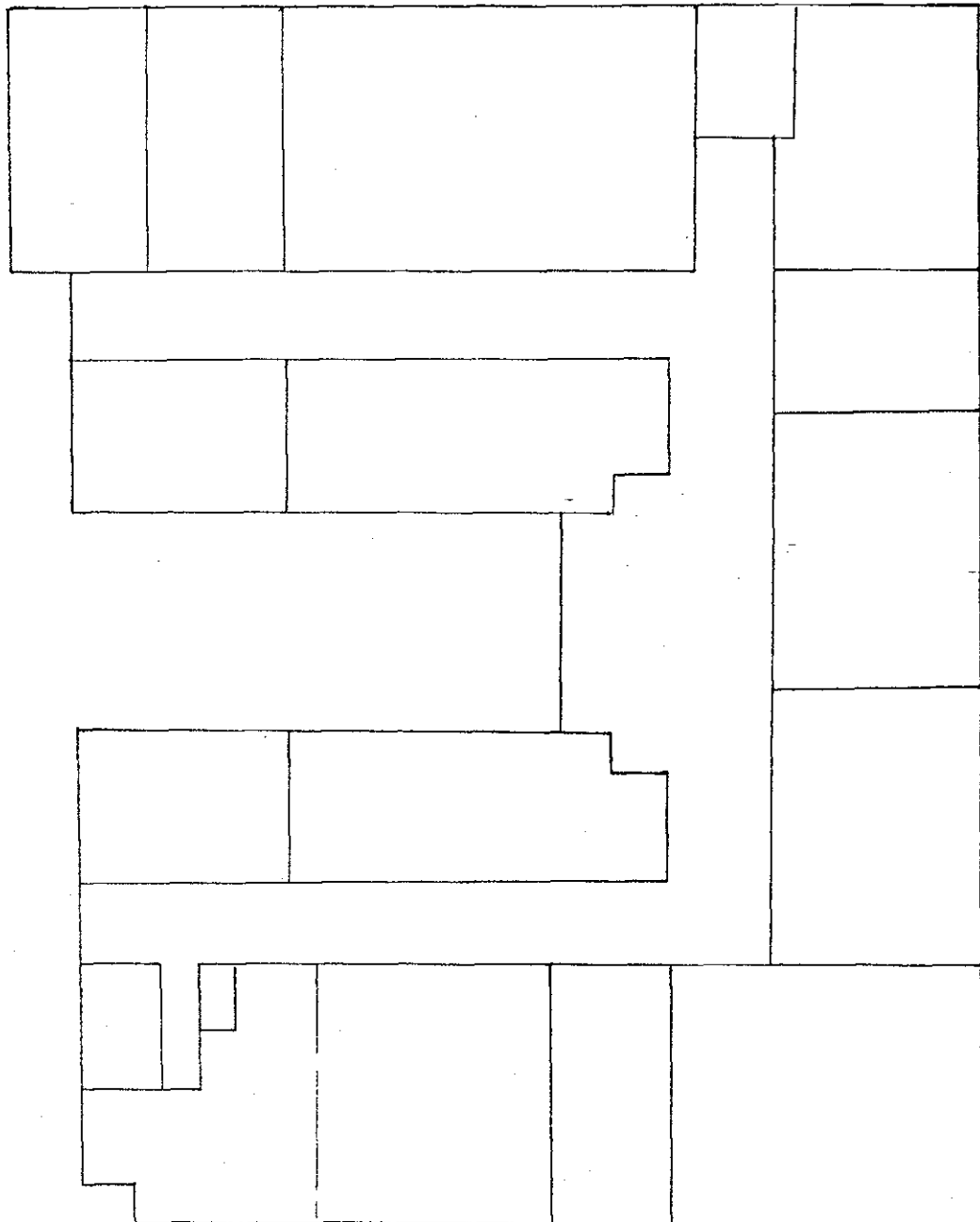
Empire Building, second floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING: 2nd floor



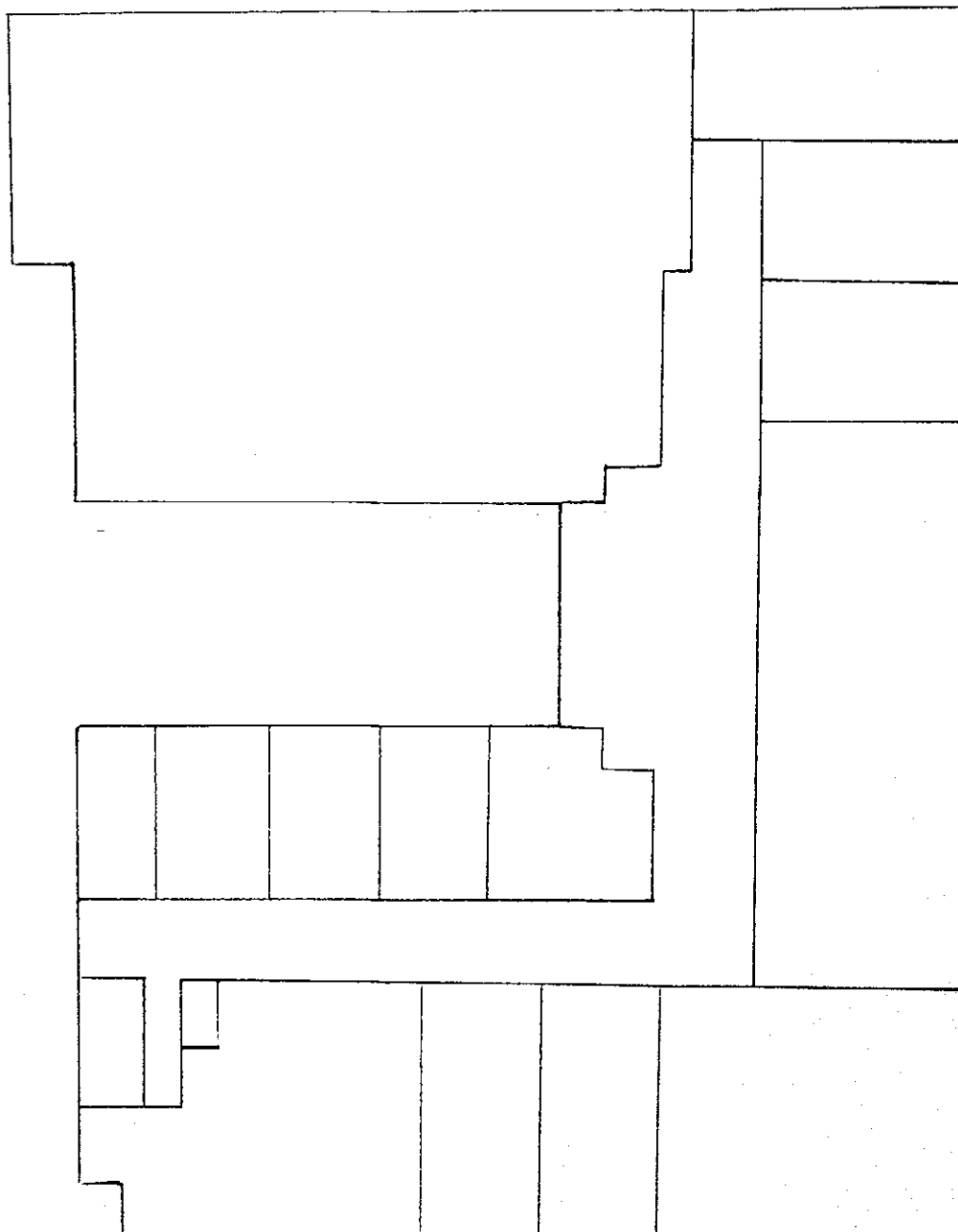
Empire Building, third floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING: 3rd floor



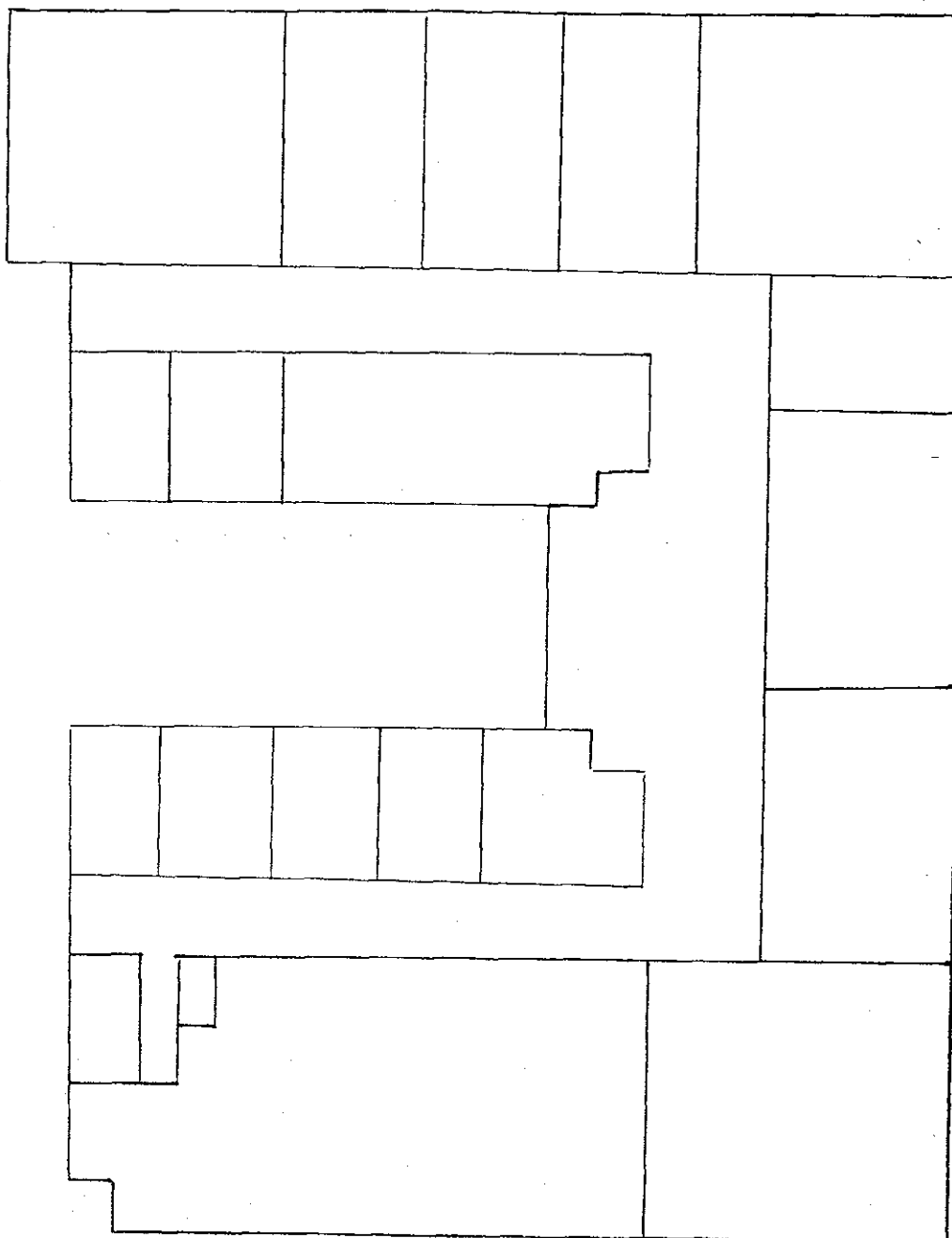
Empire Building, fourth floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING: 4th floor



Empire Building, fifth floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING: 5th floor



Empire Building, sixth floor, c. 1986. From the "Empire Building" files, BCE Development Properties.

EMPIRE BUILDING: 6th floor

